Reducing the Burden of Ovarian Cancer

WHAT IS THE PUBLIC HEALTH PROBLEM?

- Ovarian cancer is the fifth leading cause of cancer death in women.
- The American Cancer Society predicts that in 2002 there will be about 23,300 new cases of ovarian cancer in this country and that 13,900 women will die of the disease.
- Currently, half the women diagnosed with ovarian cancer die from it within 5 years.
- When detected early, the 5-year survival rate increases to 95%, but when detected in the late stages, the 5-year survival rate drops to 25%.
- A reliable screening test, which is an important tool for improving early diagnosis rates, does not exist for ovarian cancer.

WHAT HAS CDC ACCOMPLISHED?

To begin addressing the unmet public health needs associated with ovarian cancer, Congress appropriated funding for the first time in FY 2000. After completing a literature review on ovarian cancer prevention and control, CDC launched a two-pronged initiative. First, in November 2000, CDC convened an intensive workshop to solicit input from cancer experts on future ovarian cancer activities and to strengthen new partnerships with advocacy groups. Participants identified potential mechanisms and partners for prevention, early detection, treatment and surveillance and identified resource needs. Identifying the factors associated with early diagnosis of ovarian cancer is essential because this is when treatment is most likely to be effective.

Example of program in action: The Center for Health Promotion and Prevention Research at the University of Texas in Houston is conducting research on several hundred cases of ovarian cancer to identify factors that distinguish women diagnosed at an early stage from those diagnosed at later stages. Identification of early symptoms and other factors that can lead to earlier diagnosis are crucial in the development of programs to increase long-term survival rates.

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

CDC will assist states in the creation of effective ovarian cancer prevention activities, support research efforts to better understand the populations affected by ovarian cancer, evaluate access to and capacity of providers who treat ovarian cancer, develop ovarian cancer risk prediction models and develop health communication messages to provide appropriate education and information about ovarian cancer to physicians and health care providers.

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